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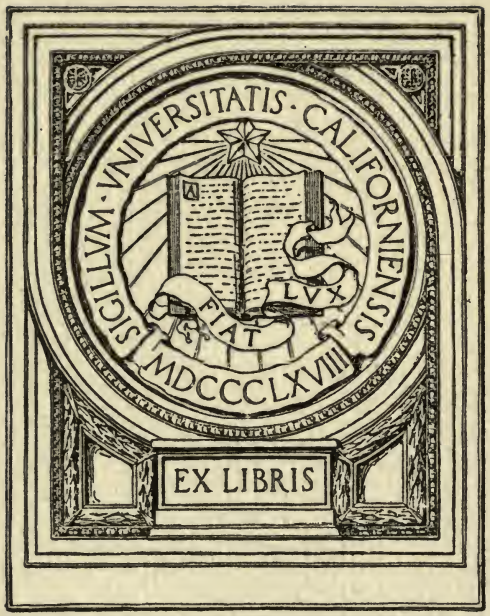
# TRISTAN AND ISEULT

ARTHUR SYMONS



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# TRISTAN AND ISEULT

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# TRISTAN AND ISEULT

## A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ARTHUR SYMONS

NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
1917

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By Brentano's

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TO

ELEONORA DUSE.

*Non sentite il sangue delle rose stillare*
*Tra le mie dita nelle vostre due mani?*

TRISTANO E ISOTTA, *Atto III.*

361201

## THE PERSONS.

KING MARK OF CORNWALL.

THE KING OF IRELAND.

TRISTAN: *Nephew of King Mark of Cornwall.*

MERIADOC: *Nephew of the Queen of Ireland.*

MELOT: *A Fool at the court of King Mark.*

A PHYSICIAN.

THE QUEEN OF IRELAND.

ISEULT OF IRELAND: *Daughter of the Queen.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY: *Cousin of Iseult of Ireland.*

BRANGAENE: *A lady in attendance on Iseult of Ireland.*

YGRAINE, ELAINE, IMOGEN } *Ladies in attendance on Iseult of Brittany.*

A CHILD.

LORDS AND ATTENDANTS.

*The action takes place in Ireland, Cornwall, Brittany, and on the sea.*

# TRISTAN AND ISEULT

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

# TRISTAN AND ISEULT.

## ACT I.

*The scene represents a large room in the palace of the* KING OF IRELAND. *There are vacant seats in the foreground on the right. In the background are two long broad steps leading to an inner room, which is seen as through the proscenium of a theatre. Women are seated just inside, working at embroidery frames. In the front is* ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *working; behind her* BRANGAENE. ISEULT OF IRELAND *is standing beside her, looking at the work. As the curtain goes up, a large door on the left is opened and the* QUEEN *enters.* MERIADOC *following her as if in eager conversation. They cross to the seats and sit down.* ISEULT OF IRELAND *comes down the steps and across the stage, with an eager movement.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

MOTHER, I knew that Tristan would come back.

QUEEN.

Why not? These wandering children of the harp
Follow the crying people of the air;
They know their seasons, they return with them.
Tristan will bring his harp into the hall

When he has rested. And now, Meriadoc,
Speak on.

MERIADOC.

I say again, the time has come.
It is a year now since my father died;
He was your brother, you have loved him well,
Almost as I have loved him, and I have loved
Your daughter and my father and no more.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Why do you speak of me?
[*She sits down, looking away from him.*

MERIADOC.

I have said the word,
Which must return to silence. Be it so.
I speak another thing now. I desire
Vengeance for Morolt, blood for Morolt's blood.

QUEEN.

And I desire no less, yet, Meriadoc,
Since no man knows the spiller of that blood,
Vengeance is but an arm that smites a sword
Into the empty, dark, and yielding air.

MERIADOC.

Give me but leave, and I will find the man.

QUEEN.

I will both give you leave, and give you that
Which when you find him shall find out his life
Surer than any hound. Here, take the key,
Iseult; bring me the knife, bring it with care,
You know its secret.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I will bring it, mother.

*[She goes back to the inner room, unlocks an oak chest which stands against the side wall, and takes out a sheathed dagger.*

(*To* ISEULT OF BRITTANY.) What would you do
with such a cruel thing,
Kind cousin Iseult?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Cast it in the sea,
My manly hearted cousin.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *holding it up.*

Is it not strange
That men play such forbidden games with death,
And we too deal the pieces? This rare thing
Will find the heart some woman's heart shall break
for.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Why do you take it in your hands?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I? Merely
To take it to my mother.

[*She carries it across to her mother, who takes it, turns it over, and as she speaks gives it to* MERIADOC.

QUEEN.

This knife I give you
Has lapped up poison night by night, and slept
Under the moon, and I have watched him sleep.
I give the knife to you: use it but once.

[MERIADOC *takes the knife and holds out the cross-shaped hilt.*

MERIADOC.

I swear upon this cross to use the knife
Once, and no more. Cousin, before I go —

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Cousin, no more of that.

MERIADOC.

You take me ill.
It is another thing I have to ask.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Where do you go?

MERIADOC.

To Cornwall.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

A stern land.
You know not whom you seek; why do you go?

MERIADOC.

Give me a thing you keep.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What shall I give you?

MERIADOC.

The splinter of the sword that killed my father.
Give it to me, and it shall draw the sword
Out of the deadly iron of the earth
Like a strong loadstone; it will know its sword.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *after a pause.*

Yes, I will give it to you, Meriadoc.

*[She rises and moves slowly across the stage towards the chest, which she has left open. The door is thrown open and an* ATTENDANT *enters.*

ATTENDANT.

Lord Tristan.

[TRISTAN *enters and walks slowly towards the* QUEEN. ISEULT *pauses and half turns, with her hand on the lid of the chest, looking fixedly at* TRISTAN.

QUEEN.

In the name of both our lands,
Welcome. A year seems but a day and night,
And I some easy sleeper, since we heard
The voices of your harp among our own.

TRISTAN.

Madam, the heaped good wishes of a year,
Longer in absence than its counted days,
Crowd back each other, asking to be first.

[*He turns towards* ISEULT, *who has slowly approached.*

Princess, I buy my welcome at your hands
With songs that I have made for you to sing;
You loved them once.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I am your pupil still.

[*She goes towards* MERIADOC *as if unconscious of her intention.*

MERIADOC.

Iseult! the gift!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What was it? I forget.
[*She stands gazing at* TRISTAN *in silence.*

QUEEN.

Was the sea fair in coming?

TRISTAN.

Fair and fierce.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

The sea is friends with you.

TRISTAN.

I follow it:
I have no other will than the sea's will.

QUEEN.

My daughter, sit beside me. You, my lord.
Here.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I must have Iseult of the White Hands.
Come, cousin, leave the armour of the knight:
It is but wool upon a frame; but here
Is the true knight; come down and welcome him.

[ISEULT OF BRITTANY *rises slowly, lays down the wool on her embroidery frame, and comes slowly across the stage. The others follow her.* TRISTAN *rises and bows low.*

TRISTAN.

I have called off your fingers from some dream
That you were weaving.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

I was only weaving
A knight in armour, dying; there is grass,
An apple orchard, birds singing, and sheep.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Have you not such a story in your songs?
But not so fair a lady in your land
As this that bears my name!

TRISTAN.

Few quite so fair,
For she is fair, yet not as Helen was,
Not as you are.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What is Helen, sir, to me?
But this white cousin Iseult of my name,

Read me this woman, Tristan; read her soul;
Look in her eyes and tell me what she is.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

I pray you do not tell me what you see.

TRISTAN.

She has the face of one who is content,
Making a little last with loving it.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Is patience, then, the nurse of love? God keep
Such as are patient!

TRISTAN.

I have read as well
How earth was crumbled up for Helen's sake
And cast like crumbs to birds.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Is love so cruel?
Is it not only in the song?

QUEEN.

My daughter,
Love is more cruel than a savage beast;
Therefore fear love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Why, how should the free soul
Fear any power under the firmament?
For there are women who have never feared
The face of steel or face of any man
Or blood or battle or the foam of the sea
When the wind wrings out the sails and washes them.

TRISTAN.

It is such women that Love loves to rule.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

How should he rule them? they that do not weave
A knight dying in an orchard, but they can die.

TRISTAN.

Yes, die for love: a woman can do that.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

O, any woman! more than die for love.
Tristan, I had an uncle whom I loved
More than I ever shall love man; this brave,
This tender, more than father to me, this
Glory of Ireland, was most foully slain.
[*She starts to her feet.*
If Morolt's murderer stood before me now
As you stand there, I, woman that I am,

(Give me your sword: I do not fear to see
The nakedness of steel: give it to my hand)

[*She takes* TRISTAN'S *sword from him and lifts it in the air.*

I would dare —

[*She looks fixedly at the sword in her hand.*

O, this is some witchcraft. No.
The sword, the sword, it cannot be the sword!

[*She runs to the open chest, takes out the splinter, and fits it to the notch in the sword.*

The sword is whole again. This sacred blood
Make my arm strong that I may drink his blood!
Die, Tristan!

[*She comes towards* TRISTAN *with the sword in her hand. All rise.* MERIADOC *puts his hand on his dagger. The* QUEEN *comes forward.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *catching* ISEULT OF IRELAND *and drawing her back.*

Iseult, will you murder him?
If you are mad, kill me!

QUEEN.

Is it not madness?

TRISTAN.

Strike! I am at your mercy.

QUEEN.

Stay, Iseult!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Mother, look well upon the sword. See now,
Here is the splinter of the sword that killed
Morolt; see how they grow together; see
The sword that Morolt died by.

QUEEN.

We have been fooled,
We have given our enemy life.

MERIADOC, *drawing his dagger.*

You gave him life
That death may find him here.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

No, Meriadoc.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What is it to you, Iseult of Brittany,
If this man live or die? No, Meriadoc,
My hand!

TRISTAN.

Iseult of Ireland, why do you wait?
Your eyes have stabbed me: finish! you have the sword.

QUEEN.

Daughter, put down the sword, he is our guest.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

He has our blood upon him.

QUEEN.

He has broken
Our bread. Put down the sword. Tristan, your life
I give you; get you gone out of our gates.
No, stand aside; be silent. All of you
Stand further off and leave us two alone.

[TRISTAN *moves across the stage and stands alone.* MERIADOC *stands apart on the other side, eyeing him. The others go out hastily.* BRANGAENE *lingers by the door.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *as she crosses the stage, half supported by* BRANGAENE.

What will they do to him? Save him for my sake,
Brangaene!

BRANGAENE.

I do not need to; he is saved.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What shall we do, mother? Oh, mother, tell me
Why could I not kill Tristan? I had the will,
And it was not your hand that stayed my hand.

QUEEN.

Fate holds the hands of all men in the dark,
And there shall not a drop of blood be shed
Before its time, although we snatch up swords.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Mother, I hate him! he has spilt our blood.
Why is it that my eyes follow his eyes,
As a hound follows his master?

QUEEN.

Do not ask:
There is no herb against the eyes of a man,
There is no stone shall turn his eyes aside.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Mother, must we forgive our enemy
And send his feet out of our house alive?

QUEEN.

He is our guest; we may not do him harm.
Daughter, if I, that so loved Morolt — blood
Could not wash out the tears I shed for him —
Can, for the honour of our house, forgive
Tristan, who slew him, can you not forgive?
I do not pardon him for pity, no,
But for my troth and honour.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Alas, mother,
That ever I was born to see this day!

MERIADOC, *coming up.*

O Queen, the knife is ready for his throat;
Say but the word, and we are all at peace.

QUEEN.

It may not be; but yet I know not well
What must be, in this backward drift of things.
[*While she is speaking,* BRANGAENE *comes forward.*

BRANGAENE.

O mistress, let me speak. These things now past
Are over; but what shall be, that is ours.
Is not the honour of the Queen more worth
Than many lives? Let the Queen's honour live.
As for this knight, the kinsman of the King,
It may be he has come, not without cause,
But for your profit in all honour. Wait,
Speak gently to him, ask him why he came,
At peril of his life, back to these shores.

QUEEN.

This is well thought, Brangaene.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

He has come
To bring into our midst some kind of death.
I know that if he goes out of our house
Living, we shall not all live well or long.
How can I hate him?

QUEEN.

Summon him, Brangaene.

[TRISTAN *comes nearer.*

TRISTAN.

Madam, I see my pardon in your eyes.
I have one word to say, and then am silent
And wait your mercy. I have brought on you
Sorrow, yet of necessity. The sword
Of Morolt and my sword were in God's hands;
We fought a just and equal fight, and each
Fought for his life in peril of his death.

QUEEN.

Tristan, I pardon you, not willingly,
But for my honour, being here my guest
And sacred to my hearth. Here is my hand.
Iseult, your hand.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Alas, that I must take
My enemy's hand in mine!

[*She gives him her hand.*

TRISTAN, *kissing the hand of the* QUEEN.

Queen, you have given
My life to me twice over, and I have
To serve you twofold now.
(*To* ISEULT.) Princess, I hold
My faith with you from this forth.

QUEEN.

Why did you come,
Knowing that you are fatal to our house?

TRISTAN.

May I speak out?

QUEEN.

Speak quickly.

TRISTAN.

If I may speak
Freely a king's speech, and being otherwise
The enemy of a king, I will disclose
The reason of my coming, which did but wait
No more than time for telling.

QUEEN.

If you have
A friendly speech, then speak it as to friends.

TRISTAN.

I am sent hither by King Mark of Cornwall,
My uncle, king of an unconquered realm,
Because he knew that his best enemy, Ireland,
Held the white pearl of the sea, and he desired
To wed the fairest woman in the world.

QUEEN.

Is this your word or his?

TRISTAN.

It is his word.
I am his speech-bearer, and in his name
I am to ask your daughter's hand for Mark.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Who praised me to King Mark?

TRISTAN.

Not least of others,
I.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Then it was a lying tongue that spoke
A coward's praise.

QUEEN.

Daughter, there is no queen
Who would need wooing more than to be told
That Mark, the King of Cornwall, sought her hand.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Mother, you do wrong to women. I have known
A woman who would have had gladlier
A shepherd's apple from a shepherd's hand
Than crowns from shaking fingers.

QUEEN.

This is not
For you or me, but for the King your father.
The safety of our land may hang upon it.
We must have counsel and the voice of the King.
Sir, we will give you instant hearing. Send,
Brangaene, quickly, to my lord the King
And crave the King's good pleasure.

BRANGAENE.

In haste, madam.
[*She goes to the door and sends messengers.*

QUEEN.

Sir, this must not be lightly thought upon
Or idly spoken of. Weigh now your words

And tell me: is your king ready for peace?
His galleys have not often come our way
With less of spears than oars.

TRISTAN.

The King desires
Peace and the marriage of two lands in one.

QUEEN.

We also desire peace; but for this marriage —

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

May Iseult speak?

QUEEN.

Speak, Iseult.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

There is no king
Could give me greatness enough to fill up
The lack that he would make in me.

QUEEN.

What lack?

[BRANGAENE *comes back.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Why, nothing but the lack of my own self:
I would rather be myself than be a queen.

BRANGAENE.

To be a queen is to have all the world
Instead of dreaming. If you had the world,
What would you do with it?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What, you too, Brangaene?

QUEEN.

Brangaene, summon those who were in the hall.
[*She goes out.*

MERIADOC.

Cousin, you should have given me the sword!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

The sword is old now, and it cannot stir,
And we must wait.
[*The guests re-enter, anxiously.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *aside.*

What have they done to him?
He is living yet and smiles: I saw him dead.
She talks apart, patient and angry.

ANOTHER WOMAN, *aside.*

See,
The Queen looks hard at Tristan, watching him
With some new purpose.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

Hush! here is the King.
[*The* KING *comes in and goes up to the* QUEEN.

QUEEN.

My lord, a boon. I ask a boon that lies
Near to my heart and to your daughter's heart.

KING OF IRELAND.

Is not the thing you ask already yours?
You are not so glad to ask as I to give.
What is the boon?

QUEEN.

My lord, to pardon Tristan.
He stands before you; I am surety for him;
He killed my brother Morolt: pardon him.

KING OF IRELAND.

This is the strangest boon was ever asked.
Was Morolt not your brother? Yet, so be it.

If you have pardoned Tristan, so have I.
Here is my hand, sir.

TRISTAN, *kneeling and kissing his hand.*

Grace, my lord the King,
Grace for my lord and master.

KING OF IRELAND.

Be it so
For you, since the Queen wills it, and for him
In his own honour. Rise and sit with me.

QUEEN.

My lord, this grave and most unlooked-for thing,
Which sets my brother's slayer by my side,
Not at my feet, but honoured and a guest,
Brings not less strange a fellow with it. This,
Our enemy, comes from our enemy,
King Mark of Cornwall, he that harried us,
And now, being other minded, offers peace.

KING OF IRELAND.

I am well content
To hold him for ally.

QUEEN.

More than ally.
He would become our kinsman, and desires

To bind us to his person, and has sent
His kinsman here to speak for him and ask
The hand of Iseult. Will you answer him?

KING OF IRELAND.

The hand of Iseult?

TRISTAN.

Even no less, my lord.
He is a king, but he is an old man,
And cannot go about the world and woo
A woman to his side. He sent me here
(Being so dear to him that he willed me King
After him, but I would have none of it)
To beg for him what, if he do not win,
He will not wed.

KING OF IRELAND.

Is he so sure as that?

TRISTAN.

So sure that he has said before his lords:
"I swear that if I may not have this woman
I will have none."

KING OF IRELAND.

That is well spoken of him.

TRISTAN.

He said, moreover, in my private ear:
"Say nothing of me, Tristan, but the truth:
How old I am, how grave, not easily moved,
But, being moved, unalterable; a man
Not without pity, yet most just; no youth
To flatter women in a ballad rhyme,
Like you who speak in stanza. Tell her this
And more," he said; "the truth: yet, win her,
Tristan!"

KING OF IRELAND.

Spoken like a lover rather than a king.
He could not ask for more, a mighty king,
And would not ask for less. What have you said,
My daughter?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Nothing. I? Nothing at all.

QUEEN.

She will not answer no. Trust me, my lord,
And trouble not the girl.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Spoken like a king
Rather than like a lover. He who speaks them
Speaks the words well.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

You are to be a queen;
You will be happy, Iseult.

QUEEN.

It remains
For us, my lord, to reason out this thing
And, if our kingdom claims, not to deny.
Were it not well to fetter Mark to us
With this unbreakable and silken chain?
What says my lord?

KING OF IRELAND.

I say that it were well,
A happy thing for Ireland and for Cornwall,
And the beginning of some peace in the world.

TRISTAN.

Long live the Queen of Cornwall!

[*All crowd up.* ISEULT OF IRELAND *turns to* BRANGAENE.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Come with me,
Brangaene. We will talk of being queens;
Not in this market, where they bid for us,
But somewhere out of doors: I am faint for air.

[*They move across the stage towards the door as the curtain falls.*

# ACT II.

## ACT II.

*The scene represents the deck of* TRISTAN'S *ship, partly curtained off. There is a couch against the bulwark; beside it a table, on which stands a cup.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *walking to and fro restlessly.*

Day and night, day and night, how many hours?

BRANGAENE.

We are two nights from Ireland, this third day
Brings us, about the second from noon,
To Cornwall.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

To my prison.

BRANGAENE.

To your throne.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *pausing and speaking earnestly.*

Brangaene, I am sold to be a queen,
My mother sold me, Tristan bought me, Mark
Pays down the price and takes me. I have wept

Tears that the sea could never salt, such tears
The whole sea shall not wipe out of my debt.

BRANGAENE.

O mistress, you have not the eyes for tears.
Comfort yourself: you shall take joy to Cornwall.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

There is none here.

BRANGAENE.

It is written in my heart.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Is it because you love me that you say
Comfortable things to me?

BRANGAENE.

The love I have
Runs forward. I am your watchdog, and I hear
A footstep in the dark.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What do you hear?
What can you hear but the old feeble feet
Of a grey king?

BRANGAENE.

Is it a little thing,
Kings will kneel down to you?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What do I want with knees
That kneel because their joints are growing old?
I am to be an honourable wife
To the old king who harried us till age
Quieted him into fear. He would have peace,
And I am the peace-offering.

BRANGAENE.

It may be
That you will bring some peace upon yourself.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Death would bring peace: if this bright sea would lift
And take me down where Tristan could not dive
Nor Mark cast nets upon me! no, nor Iseult,
My cousin of Brittany, with her patient eyes
Weep as she did for Tristan, not for me:
All are against me.

BRANGAENE.

Do not think these things.
It may be joy will come to you, if not peace.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

No, for I think too much, and there's too little
That I can do. Why is it I can do nothing?
The man I would have killed holds both my hands.

[MERIADOC *comes forward, kneels, and kisses the hem of* ISEULT'S *robe, looking up at her intently.*

Cousin, you have some message in your eyes.
Tell it.

MERIADOC.

Iseult, I kneel to you. Iseult,
It might be now, if you will give the word.
He is unarmed, he leans beside the helm,
My men are all about him; one of them
Will strike the helmsman, set the helm about.
Tristan is mine: this dagger is for him.
One word, Iseult, and you are free, O queen!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Tristan is mine: why do you call him yours?
Do I not hate him worse than you can do,
Because I am a woman? If, some day,
He break the faith that we have sworn to him,
He is yours; do with him what you will. But now
There is a bond between us, and he must live
So long as he keeps faith with his own word.

[MERIADOC *rises sullenly.*

MERIADOC.

The blood of Morolt sinks into my soul:
I have not sworn, take off your hand from me.
It is for you I wait and do not strike.
Say now that I may free my soul and yours!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Meriadoc, stand here. No, closer: here.
Give me your dagger. (*He gives her the dagger eagerly.*)
Do you still obey
My will because it is my will?

MERIADOC, *excitedly.*

Yes, yes!
Iseult, the word now!

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *holding out the dagger.*

Swear, then, on this cross
To keep your faith with Tristan while he keeps
His faith with me!

MERIADOC.

I am your slave; yet ask
Some other thing than this.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Swear on this cross!

MERIADOC.

Iseult, my life is yours.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Swear!

MERIADOC.

Take my life
And give me this man's!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Swear upon the cross!

MERIADOC.

I swear.

*[He holds out his hand over the hilt of the dagger, then takes the dagger and puts it back in its sheath.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Call Tristan. I would speak with him.

[MERIADOC *bends low and goes out.*

BRANGAENE.

Is it well?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

It is well. I am tired of silence.
Have no fear. I will talk with him alone.

And you, for you are tired, give your eyes rest
And go and sleep a little. I will call
If I should need you.

BRANGAENE.

I am indeed sick
For lack of sleep; but should I leave you?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Go.
Sleep, rest, and come again.

[BRANGAENE *goes out.*

[ISEULT *sits in meditation.*

[*There is a pause, and* TRISTAN *enters.*

TRISTAN.

You sent for me.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

You would not come unless I sent for you.

TRISTAN.

I feared to come uncalled.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

How is this, sir?
You did not fear, I think, to come uncalled
To Ireland.

TRISTAN.

I was sent.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

You did not come
For any will of yours — that I know well;
And yet you came. It is not what we would,
But what we must do, that we do.

TRISTAN.

True, madam.
For me, I have always done what the sea would:
Once the sea took me to you, and now again
It casts me back to you the second time.
I do not know why I am on this ship.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

You are my gaoler.

TRISTAN.

You are bitter, madam.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

You have been bitter to me from the first.
Before I knew you I had never known
Sorrow; it was your courage and your craft
That brought sorrow upon me. What ill star
Led you from Cornwall into Ireland?

TRISTAN.

What
May not the blind stars do with us who are blind?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Once had your sword not eyes? But none of that.
I will but ask you why you drag me out
From my own land into this foreign land
To be a stranger among strangers. Where
You carry me I know not, nor what price
Was paid for me, nor what shall be the end.

TRISTAN.

Say what you will, I have not done you wrong
To bring you to a kingdom. You shall find
Peace in it and a crown; you shall have riches
And pleasure and content and idleness,
And you shall be the wife of a great king.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Sir, I would rather have a lower lot
In my own land, and love with it, than here
A loveless trouble with great riches.

TRISTAN.

No,
Not loveless and not troubled, but the pride
And wage of beauty: all men's eyes and one
Man's love upon you.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Have you such a wage?
Is it for love that you would have me wed
An old king in an island of my foes?

TRISTAN.

For love of love, for love of power, for pride.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Who shall I have to look into my eyes
That I may be his life and death to him?

TRISTAN.

I may not answer you. You gave me life.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

You have been evil to me, and not good,
And yet I gave you life. Is this well done?

TRISTAN.

You gave me life. I thanked you for the gift.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I would have given you death. The second time
Why was it that I did not give you death?
Why did I give you life?

TRISTAN, *half drawing his sword and holding the hilt towards her.*

I give you back
The gift you gave, if you will have it back.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Tristan, stand fast, and keep me to my word.
I keep you to your word to me. Stand fast,
For there is blood between us.
[*She starts to her feet.*

TRISTAN.

For that blood
Have I not made atonement? Let there be
Peace between you and me.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What peace? What peace?

TRISTAN.

If there is no peace left us possible,
There is no less one thing between us two —
Honour: let everything but honour die.
The past is dead already; for the future
We'll also say Amen; for what now is,
The present of this instant, I have sworn
To bring you of all women for a wife
Home to my lord the King. I serve my King

In all things honourable; I will serve
My Queen in all things as I serve my King.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Where is it written that I shall be served
By this wise enemy, who stole my peace
As a thief takes a jewel? If there be
Atonement for the blood that you have shed,
How can there be atonement for my peace?

TRISTAN.

All things may be forgotten.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

All things past
Were well forgotten, when to think of them
Burns like a fire. Then, lest I should forget
That all things are forgotten, let us seal
This covenant. I will bid Brangaene — no,
Brangaene is asleep. Where is the child
Who loves to wait upon me? Child!

[*A* CHILD *puts aside a curtain and runs up.*

Bring me some wine,
A flagon, and a cup, and fill the cup.

[*The* CHILD *runs back and returns with a flagon and a cup, which she fills.*

[ISEULT *takes it from her, and she goes quietly back through the curtain with the empty flagon.*

This wine shall wash out Morolt's blood. I drink
Forgetfulness, I put away my hate,
I will love no man, I will be friends with you,
Tristan, for Mark's sake, I will be a queen,
I will wed Mark. Pledge me! my husband, Mark!
[*She drinks and hands him the cup.*

TRISTAN.

Health to Iseult, honour and peace to Mark!
[*He drinks.*
[*There is a long pause, and they slowly recoil from each other, looking with amazement in each other's eyes.*
[*The cup drops from his hands.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Tristan!

TRISTAN.

Iseult! O, is it life or death,
Iseult? Am I awakening into death?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I too, I think I am awakening.
Wait for me, Tristan, I have been asleep.

TRISTAN.

Iseult!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I will not go to sleep again,
But you did well to waken me. I thank you.

TRISTAN.

But yesterday death was not; nay, no more
Than even such an instant point of time,
And there is something born into the world:
Is it death, is it love? I cannot tell;
Only it is an ending and a birth.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

You have been crying to me in my dreams;
I heard your voice, I thought it was the sea,
And that awoke me, and I find you here.

TRISTAN.

I think I have been always at your side.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

No, no, not always: I remember now,
There was another time before this time.
This is the sea, Ireland is far away;
But you are with me and I am awake at last.

TRISTAN.

I do not think that I am yet awake.
What is it that has bound me with these chains
That burn like shining fire about my soul?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What is it that has set me free? I feel
As if a boundless joy had given me wings:
I am as universal as the sun.
Look, Tristan, there is nothing here but light:
Light in the sky, light in the hollow sea,
The encircling and caressing light of the air!
Light eats into my flesh and drinks me up:
I am a cup for the immense thirst of light;
I cannot see you, Tristan, for the light.

TRISTAN.

Iseult, I see you wrapped about with light
As in a glory, clothed and garlanded,
And your face shines, it dazzles me; your eyes
Are burning out of brightness like two flames.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Tristan, I love you.

TRISTAN.

Iseult!

[*They rush into each other's arms.*

I have loved
Your hatred, now I love you for your love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *looking up at him, in the embrace.*

Have we been foes? I think we have been foes.
Look deeper, Tristan, deeper in my heart.

TRISTAN.

I look into your eyes, you have grey eyes,
They are as deep and changing as the sea,
There is not any shadow in your eyes.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *withdrawing from the embrace.*

There is a weary, salt, and bitter thing
That eats my heart. I know not what it is.
[*She moves a few steps away.*

TRISTAN.

Yet love is stronger than the sea or death.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *crouching down on the seat by the bulwarks.*

O what is love, and why is love so bitter
After the blinding sweetness of a moment?
I am afraid, I am afraid of love.
This is some death that has got hold on me;
The night is coming back into my soul.

Tristan, I am afraid. If this is love,
I am afraid of the intolerable love.

[*She covers her face with her hands.*

[*There is a long pause.*

[*Tristan looks at her in silence, then goes up to her slowly and touches her on the shoulder.*

TRISTAN.

Fear not, Iseult; this thing must be endured;
We have not sought it, it must be endured.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *looking up slowly.*

O is this love, and must we endure love?
I did not know that love was so like death.
O sorrowful, unkind, unhappy love!

TRISTAN.

I think that from this moment we have done
With being happy or unhappy: all
We have to do is only to rejoice
Because we are together and alive.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

You do not fear? You do not wonder now?
Love me no better than I love you, Tristan!
Tristan, I still wonder and am afraid.

TRISTAN.

Love casts out fear, not wonder. Is it not
A thing past wonder that, of all the dust
Time shakes out of his hourglass, he has made
This little hour for us to meet in?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Yes,
I will believe it, but not wonder at it.
Tristan, I am content. I will not fear.
There shall be now for us nothing of all
That has been all things to us; we are gone
A great way out into an unknown sea;
There is no land behind us. Look, Tristan,
The sea is naked as the hand of a man,
The sea gathers us up into its hand.
Take me in your arms and kiss me on the mouth.

[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her.*

BRANGAENE, *rushing in.*

O woe! O woe! O most unhappy woman!
What have I done? I would that I had died!
Why did you let me sleep away your life?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What does this mean, Brangaene?

BRANGAENE.

The cup! The cup!
[*She snatches up the flagon from the table.*

TRISTAN.

What of the cup?

BRANGAENE.

O mistress, there is death,
And worse than death, hid in the cup.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Why, what is worse than death?

BRANGAENE.

Love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *eagerly.*

And the cup,
It was the cup of love?

BRANGAENE.

It was the cup
Of love. Your mother bade me give it you
Upon your marriage-night. It would have bound
Your heart and the King's heart into one heart.
But now, but now, mistress, what have you done?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I have done that which shall not be undone.
Give me the cup.

[BRANGAENE *gives it to her reluctantly.*

[*She takes it in both hands and holds it against her breast, reverently.*

O sacred cup of love
And death, I hold you.

[*Then she casts it far out into the sea.*

And I cast you out,
That no man save this man may drink of you,
Nor any other woman.

TRISTAN.

I have drunk
A poison that no man has ever tasted,
For it has withered honour in my heart
And filled my soul up with forgetfulness.
There was a king for whom I would have died.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

All this shall be forgotten. What must be
Must be, and it is we who have been bound
Together, and this king I am to marry
Is as a stranger I shall never know.
Blessed be the cup of love, and, O Brangaene,
I bless those little hands that gave it me,
Innocent hands, not knowing what they gave.
You also shall be blessed, because you slept
And all your wisdom could not hold me back
From what I had to do.

TRISTAN.

What does she say
Of death?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Good tidings, Tristan.

BRANGAENE.

Evil tidings.
There were both love and death hid in the cup;
This cup shall be one death to both of you.

TRISTAN.

I could not love you, Iseult, and not die.

[MERIADOC *comes in, looking scrutinizingly at the three, and comes forward anxiously.*

MERIADOC.

My lady has no further need of me.
Now it is Tristan who must keep his faith,
And I with Tristan, for her eyes are changed.
They tell me, Tristan, that from this day forth
I have to serve you.

TRISTAN, *holding out his hand.*

As a friend a friend.

[MERIADOC *clasps hands with* TRISTAN, *who moves aside and leans against the bulwark of the ship.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Call me the little maid.

[MERIADOC *goes out and, after a moment, the* CHILD *enters.*

Come, little one.
Child, give me both your hands; closer to me.
I want to look at you and hold your hands.
I think I love you. Do you love me, child?

CHILD.

Yes, lady, dearly.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

When you brought me wine
You gave me something that you did not know,
And I too did not know. I took the cup
Out of these little hands, and now I kiss
Your hands because you gave me a great gift.

[*She kisses her two hands, one after the other.*

CHILD.

O lady, I would give you all the world.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Why so you have; you have given me all the world.

CHILD.

I gave you nothing. When you are a queen —

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What shall I give you when I am a queen?

CHILD.

I want to see you with a golden crown.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

And is that all?

CHILD.

I want you to be just
As happy always as you are to-day.
Is it because of the crown? You used to be
Prouder, but not so happy.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I do not know.
Perhaps it is not good to be a queen.
I am going to a land I do not know.

CHILD, *looking away.*

Look, look, there is the land! O, is it Cornwall?
[*The* CHILD *runs away and looks over the side of the ship.*

[TRISTAN *comes back towards* ISEULT *and* BRANGAENE.

[SAILORS, *etc., come forward over the deck, making preparations for landing.*

CRIES, *within.*

Ho! Cornwall!

BRANGAENE.

Mistress!

TRISTAN.

Iseult!

CRIES, *within.*

Cornwall! Cornwall!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Is this my kingdom? Why, an angry shore.
Tristan, your hand, to lead me to the King!
[*Smiling, she holds out her hand to him as the curtain falls.*

# ACT III.

# ACT III.

*The scene represents a garden in the palace of* KING MARK *at Tintagel, overlooking the sea. The sea is seen below, through the trees at the edge of the rocky cliff. It is nearly dawn on a day in summer.*

KING MARK *comes out hurriedly from under the trees on the right, dragging after him* MELOT *the jester, who throws himself at his feet.*

KING MARK.

You saw the Queen?

MELOT.

My lord, I saw the Queen.
Master! forgive me!

KING MARK.

Once you saw the Queen
Under the willow-trees beside the spring;
You put a poison into both my ears:
Where was truth then?

MELOT.

Master, this tale is true.
It is my sorrow that I tell you truth,
Because I love you. Let the fool speak truth!

KING MARK.

I wrong no woman and no man again
For any idle speech. You have been warned.
Now, still you saw the Queen?

MELOT.

I saw the Queen,
Past midnight —

KING MARK.

How? You do not sleep by night?
You spy for me by night?

MELOT.

I had slept; I dreamed.

KING MARK.

Well, and your dream?

MELOT.

The horn of the white moon
Pointed.

KING MARK.

Well, well?

MELOT.

I heard an owlet hoot
Three times; three callings.

KING MARK.

But the dream?

MELOT.

I rose,
Because the moon called and the owlet called;
I looked out of my window: all the ground
Was moist because of the long evening rain.
I saw his footprints.

KING MARK.

Wherefore his?

MELOT.

They led
From under Tristan's window. This is truth,
Master, the truth of God!

KING MARK.

You followed them?

MELOT.

I followed, and where he had set his feet
I set my feet, footprint for footprint. So,
Stepping without a trace, delicately,
I came to the Queen's window.

KING MARK.

He was there?

MELOT.

He stood and reached his hands to her, who stood
Higher than she could reach him, though she leaned
Her right arm from the casement, murmuring.

KING MARK.

What did she say?

[KING MARK *clutches his arm.*

Come, you must say the words,
But quietly.

MELOT.

Master, you hurt me.

KING MARK.

Come,
The words she said.

MELOT.

I could not hear the words.
But Tristan stood and lifted up his hands,
Entreating something, and she laughed.

KING MARK.

She laughed.
Then she was only merry; a wild jest,
No more than that. And she was flushed?

MELOT.

No, pale,
And Tristan paler, and both as if some hunger
Starved both their faces thin.

KING MARK.

That's not so good.
And then?

MELOT.

Then Tristan turned, and I drew back.
I looked again, he seemed to say farewell,
And I went softly backward in his steps,
Crept in at my own window, watched, and saw
Tristan returning.

KING MARK.

If this thing be true,
Which cannot be, or there's an end of truth,
Yet may be true, and then, why, Tristan's dead.

Not a word more, Melot; he was my sword:
Swords may dig graves; but yet it is not true.
Her eyes are naked to me, clean as light,
It is impossible to doubt her eyes.
[*He walks away and comes back as he speaks.*
No, no, I'll not believe it: if it be,
These two have done dishonour on their souls
Deep as my hurt, deeper than any hurt.
Melot, my friend, my fool, what have I done
That I should house this grief? If this be so,
My fool must pity me.
[MELOT *embraces his feet.*
I wrong myself
Even to doubt. I should not hear your words.

MELOT.

Have you not seen their faces as they burned
Like flame on flame?

KING MARK.

I have seen their faces burn
Like flame on flame. Why should a natural fire
Not burn? And why should we put out the day?

MELOT.

Master, master, I have not told you all.

KING MARK.

The truth, Melot, and, before God, the truth!

MELOT.

What if I tell you of the very hour —
It is an hour from now — here, in this garden.
Do you not hunt to-night?

KING MARK.

Before the dawn.

MELOT.

Is Tristan with you?

KING MARK.

Tristan would not come.

MELOT.

Before the dawn they will be here together.
Will you be led by Melot? Go your way,
Feign to lead off the hunt; but come again,
Suddenly, in an hour, where Melot is,
And you shall take them in each other's arms.

KING MARK.

What if I thrust this sword into your heart
You would have me lift on Tristan?

MELOT.

Sire, to-morrow
Thrust your sword deeper down into my heart
Than any lie you find there.

KING MARK.

Who of us,
I wonder, Melot, is to die to-night?
I have trusted only one man in the world
And loved only one woman. If these two
Are now in league against me, I am cast out
Of an unnatural and foolish heaven
They lured me into. Were it not but just
If with one sword I slew these two? And then —

MELOT, *crouching beside him.*

My lord, my lord, you will not lift your hand
Against your own life? Swear it on the cross!

[*He snatches up a gold cross which* KING MARK *wears on his chain and holds it up to him.*

KING MARK.

No, no, there are no oaths for me. I speak
I know not what. Death is a woman and plays
A secret game with us. What shall it be
If this be true, if this impossible,
Unthinkable, all too likely thing be true?

[*He goes slowly out, followed by* MELOT. *There is a pause, and* TRISTAN *and* ISEULT OF IRELAND *come slowly out from under the trees on the left. They move partly across the garden, then stop, and stand face to face.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

If death should come upon us in this hour,
What would you say? Would you thank God for life?

TRISTAN.

I would thank God for life,
For I have lived, this hour, two lives in one.
Have I not held your body with my hands?
Have I not drunk your soul up with my lips?
Have I not hated you with all my love?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Is it the dawn? Look up. Do not the stars
Doubt and not know if it is day or night?
Night has not been, and this is not the dawn.

TRISTAN.

It is the dawn. Why is it I must go?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I cannot let you go. Listen: the leaves
Are still, and the sea scarcely shivers. Come,
I will not let you go.

TRISTAN.

Shall I stay here
Until you bid me go?

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *gathering handfuls of roses.*

No, no, for that
Would never be. See where the roses burn!

These roses are the prodigals of June,
They burn, they waste to ashes, they are a fire
Too spendthrift of the summer. Take them, Tristan.
Do you not feel the blood of the roses burn
Between my fingers into both your hands?

TRISTAN.

I have let them fall.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Let them lie there and die
Before they know the long rains of the year
And weeping autumn. So should all flowers die,
And we. Will you not linger if I talk
Of roses and heap up into your hands
So many that you cannot see my face?
[*They sit down on a stone seat under the trees, beside the rosebushes.*
And yet: must you not go?

TRISTAN.

The light begins
To search into your eyes. Is it your face?
I shall not find it when I look again.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *flinging her arms around him.*

I cannot let you go; I put my hands
About your neck; I hold you with my hands.
You will not leave me while I hold you fast?

TRISTAN.

How should I leave my love, my sustenance,
And go into an exile willingly?
And yet you catch at me as if you feared
That I would let you go.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I hold you fast
Because I fear: hold me and comfort me.
Swear over the old oaths, they are all here,
Here is my heart; but swear them over, Tristan,
Before you go; and kiss me in the neck.

TRISTAN.

I have no words that can be said twice over.
[*He kisses her.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Tristan, it is my life
Your lips drink up: I cannot bear your lips:
I feel them to the marrow of my bones.
O I would be a fire and burn your lips,
O I would be a beast and eat your lips,
I would annihilate their sweetness. Now
My blood is all an anguish of desire.
Speak, slay me, do not kiss me. Kiss me now!

TRISTAN, *drawing back from her and looking into her eyes.*

Iseult, there is an end,
Men say, to love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

O foolish men!

TRISTAN.

For us
Shall our love have an end? Shall time pluck out
Our eyes, put out our blood? Shall we two see
Each other and not tremble? I hold your hands
In both my hands: one day shall we take hands
And not a vein in either of them leap up
To bid the other welcome?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

What shall time
Steal from the blood? What is there he can steal
Out of the marrow that is in the bones?

TRISTAN.

Nothing; the blood and marrow, these remain,
But there is something over in the soul
That will not be cast out. I have drunk up
All but forgetfulness.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

I have drunk up
Forgetfulness. It was a bitter draught;
Lees of the drink: Mark and a marriage-bed!
But the first draught, the sweetness of it, Tristan!

TRISTAN.

I have forgotten that I had a friend.
He would have thrust a crown upon me, but
I had no uses for it. No man loved
Another as he loved me, and now, now
My neck is set into a felon's noose:
I am dragged up and down here in the dust.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Love is a sword, and the sword severs friends;
Love is a fire and burns all lesser things.
Love is not love
Unless it root up honour like a weed.

TRISTAN.

Love is not love unless it honour honour
Above all mortal things.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

There is a thing
Which is the faith of love: I know none else,

No other God, or king, or counsellor,
No crown, no joy, no glory, and it devours
All pleasures and all bonds and is a flame
No wind shall put out.

TRISTAN.

Only now a wind
Has put my honour out, as a wind blows
A candle out, and all the room is dark.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Why will you cry that barren bastard word
Honour? I tell you, Tristan, I would now
Walk up the minster aisle at Caerleon,
Barefoot before the bishops and their God,
And hold the red-hot iron in my hand.
Fire would not burn me: God would do me right:
I have not sinned against the honour of love.

TRISTAN.

What have I done that any woman born
Should love me so beyond her soul? God knows
That I must love you, Iseult, beyond death.
[*He kneels down and kisses her hand.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Death shall end all things: we are quiet then:
I shall not want your love when I am dead:

Take back your honour and let it warm your grave;
But, till the grasses creep and cover me,
Tristan, this is my body and my blood,
And they are yours.

TRISTAN.

The world passes away,
You have put the world into a dusty pit,
And all is covered up. Do with my life
What you would do with it.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Shall I know your soul?
Tristan, what if the King should find us here?

TRISTAN.

I would not raise my hand against my King:
If he would slay me, he has but to strike.

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *starting to her feet.*

Coward to me!
Let Mark's right hand fumble about your heart
With the hunting knife that never killed a deer!
Have I no place there? Would you have him find me
There, where he looks to find me?

TRISTAN.

He is my King.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Will you be false to me, and for a king?

TRISTAN.

Why do you look upon me with such eyes?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Tristan, take hold of me, and hold me fast,
And hurt my fingers between both your hands,
And kiss me on the lips, and say I have lied!

TRISTAN.

I kiss your head that God made for a crown,
But I will swear no oaths now any more:
We have said all that need be said till death.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Now, go; go quickly; for the dawn is here.
How soon it comes! I did not see it come,
And how the day has all its eyes on us.
Hark, what was that? No, do not stir.
[*She seizes him.*

TRISTAN.

I hear
Brangaene calling.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

She is running, see,
Under the trees.
[BRANGAENE *comes towards them, running.*

BRANGAENE.

Mistress!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Why do we know
The thing before it comes and not believe it?
Is it the King, Brangaene?

BRANGAENE.

It is the King!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Were we not talking, Tristan, of to-morrow?
There shall be no to-morrow. This is well.

BRANGAENE, *panting.*

The King came to the gate, he stayed at the gate;
Melot rose up out of a spying corner

And whispered in his ear; Melot had seen
Lord Tristan when he entered; the King turned;
Melot and he went stealthily away;
Melot turned back and watched at the gate;
But now is the King gone to summon these
That shall be eyes to him and see his shame.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Tristan, there is no need now any more
To make a hooded secret of our love;
Soon the whole world shall look into our hearts
Because Mark wills it. The King's will be done.

TRISTAN.

I have undone the glory of your crown:
Men shall speak evil of you for my sake:
I would that Mark had stabbed me in my sleep!

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Now I am glad, utterly glad at last,
This first time wholly since the day of days
We drank down love together. I have my will,
I have always willed that he should take us thus.
[*She takes Tristan's hand.*
Is he not long in coming? Go, Brangaene,
Open the door for the King's coming; bring
My lord the King and greet him from his wife.

[KING MARK *enters, closely followed by* MELOT; *behind them the lords of the court, in hunting dress.* KING MARK *pauses and then comes slowly forward.*

KING MARK, *to* ISEULT.

Queen, I have come to take you to your throne.
My kingdom cannot spare you; you are wise,
Wiser than women; I have need of you.
There has been also some particular love
By which, in the past, I have been bound to you:
That will I lay aside, needing it not.
These lords bear witness you are my true Queen;
You have been dear to me, being my wife,
And I have something that I will not say;
Only, I do you honour as my Queen.

[KING MARK *turns slowly to* TRISTAN.

But you, blood of my blood, sword of my sword,
I have no words to be avenged on you.
I shall wipe Cornwall clean of such a shame.
This, my good lords, is Tristan, my sister's son,
My son, if he had willed to be my son;
I would have given him up my kingdom: he,
For honour's sake and for your sake, my lords,
Would none of it: he would not take my crown.
O baser, infinite ingratitude,
He would not take my kingdom; no, he would
That I should wed him from inheritance.
He brought me this — this Queen to be my wife,
That he might take a woman from my bed.
O Tristan, there are many souls in hell
That have not dragged so base a sin as this
Out of the sight and judgment-place of God.

TRISTAN, *who has drawn back, with bowed head.*

King! Master!

KING MARK.

He is speechless.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Let me speak!
Only, my lord, bid these begone from us:
We have no need of any witness now.
[KING MARK *motions to the* LORDS, *who go out.*

MELOT, *as he goes.*

I have cracked the nut; they will scramble for the pieces.

[*He goes out.*

KING MARK.

Iseult, is there, then, anything to say?

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

My lord, you see that Tristan cannot speak,
You see that Tristan is too honourable
To speak the truth. I am a woman, sir,
And women have no honour mixed in the blood
That sways to a man for loving. You and I
Were set into one bed because two lands
Had torn too long at one another's throats:
I brought you Ireland, and you gave me Cornwall.

What did you give me in a little earth
That weighs no more than mine? I am alive
Wherever there is the earth under me.
There is a thing not meshed into your crown,
There is a thing, my lord, most necessary
To every soul that comes into the world:
I have not stolen it, Tristan gave it me.
He did not rob you: he had it of himself,
You cannot punish us because we loved.

KING MARK.

I loved you; you have wronged me in my love.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

This love is innocent as life or death.
The open unastonished eyes of day
Look on it and are not ashamed. There is
No other thing necessary in the world.
But you have killed it, and for your own sake
Dragged your own honour in the dust. Now, now,
What will you do for love's sake?

KING MARK, *turning from her.*

Tristan first.
Stand up before me, Tristan. Answer me:
Will your tongue speak this woman's evil words?
No, you are silent; there is still a little,
A little honour left. You turn from her:
Your forehead is a penitent for shame.

TRISTAN.

I turn to you, my King, but not from her;
For I have wronged you. If I have brought wrong
Upon the Queen of Cornwall, not my life
Shall ransom my misdeed; for what besides
Now lies between us, there is nothing left
For me to do, nothing to undo; all
Is over, and the end of things has come.
If there is any honour left in me,
It may be honour shall yet make me whole.

KING MARK.

Tristan, give me your sword.

[TRISTAN *gives him his sword, which he breaks across his knee and throws on the ground.*

Your sword I break,
Only I leave you, not for pity, life.
It may be you will yet redeem your honour;
But here, no more; you are as one now dead,
Cast out of the clean honest midst of us.
I banish you from Cornwall.

[ISEULT OF IRELAND *springs forward and draws out a naked dagger, which she offers to* TRISTAN.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

No, not that!
Kill Mark!

TRISTAN, *putting by her hand gently.*

I have been conquered, and all's vain, Iseult.
If you have loved me, be a little sorry.
And you, my King, forgive me.
[*He goes out slowly and with bent head.*

KING MARK.

Iseult, come!
[*He holds out his hand to her as the curtain falls.*

# ACT IV.

# ACT IV.

*The scene represents a room in the castle in Brittany; at the back is a window overlooking the sea. On the left* TRISTAN *lies in bed, asleep. By the side of the bed is a table, on which stands a flagon of wine and a cup. There is a door on the right.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY *is watching beside* TRISTAN. ELAINE *stands at the foot of the bed.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Look out and see if you can see the ship.

ELAINE.

Madam, there is not a sail upon the sea.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Is the wind rising?

ELAINE.

The wind is striking
The waves like a great hammer on the walls.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *bending over* TRISTAN *and then moving away.*

He is asleep. Call the physician in.
[ELAINE *goes to the door and beckons.*
[*The physician comes in.*
Can my lord live? Speak low. He is asleep.

PHYSICIAN.

Madam, must I speak comfortable words
Or speak the truth?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

The truth.

PHYSICIAN.

All things are possible
To our divine and undivulged art:
It may be he will live.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

It may be? Speak
More comfortable words, and yet speak truth.

PHYSICIAN.

All things being possible in medicine,
And all things known that may destroy or heal
Being known to this great doctor of Salerno

We look for in the ship that Tristan sent,
It may be that this lord of secret things
Has found some magic herb of Italy
We know not of, north of the western waters.
If he have found some curable accident
Of nature, and how poison can lick up
Poison, my lord may still be saved; and yet,
If he should live —

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

If he should live?

PHYSICIAN.

The wonder
Will outpace nature, for so fierce a wound,
So deadly venomed, I have never seen.
The knife that pierced him was a savage knife,
Dipped in some foul, unnatural broth of death,
Poisoning the sources, and his blood is turned
Quite out of the honest current of the blood.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

It was the poisoned knife of Meriadoc.
The knife was not so mortal as it was
When Tristan struck him back.

PHYSICIAN.

He struck the heart;
The traitor's hand was not so sure; the wound

Had healed by now but for the poison in it.
Whence had this man so fierce a drug? The like
Is only brewed by witches over sea.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

A witch, yes, a most deadly Irish witch.

PHYSICIAN.

This poison has been bought at a great price.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

A great price paid in hell and hoarded up
To be my wedding gift. Must Tristan die?

PHYSICIAN.

'T is a strange thing he has lived so many days,
Outlived the limit. Something holds him still,
I know not what, to life. Does my lord desire
The questionable gift of life so much?
Men dying have lived on by willing it.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

I did not know that he loved life so much.
He has been moody, he has only cared
For fighting in the field; I have never seen
A joyous ardour in him since he came

Back to our coasts, not even when he drove
The enemies from our gates and gave my father
His dukedom back.

PHYSICIAN.

Did he not take the hand
Of the duke's noble daughter for a gift
And guerdon? He has reason to love life.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Seek for it elsewhere.

PHYSICIAN.

It may be in the ship.
Does he not question eagerly of the ship
We wait for from Salerno?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Eagerly.

PHYSICIAN.

Hope bids him live. He lives until he sees
The ship, and then — God send his grace therewith!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

I thank you. You have put into my heart
A little seed of hope, and it will grow.
Go quietly. He still sleeps. He must not wake.

[*The* PHYSICIAN *goes out.*

ELAINE.

O lady, is there any hope?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

All hope,
This learned man has told me, all hope now
Is in the ship. My lord will surely live
Until the ship is here.

ELAINE.

And then?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Why, then,
He is saved.

ELAINE.

Who is this lady that is coming
To save him?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Lady?

ELAINE.

Might this lady be
Some kinswoman or cousin of my lady?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Why who then?

ELAINE.

She who is coming in the ship.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

There is no woman coming in the ship.
The ship is coming from Salerno with
The greatest leech in Italy.

ELAINE.

But no,
How can that be?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Why not?

ELAINE.

Because the ship
Set sail for Cornwall.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *starting.*

Cornwall?

ELAINE.

Was it not?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *checking herself.*

Ah yes, to Cornwall. How did you know, my child?

ELAINE.

I listened —

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Yes.

ELAINE.

I heard, although my lord
Spoke low. He bade take ship —

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

To Cornwall?

ELAINE.

Yes,
With speed, and bring back speedily —

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Yes, bring —

ELAINE.

The name was yours, madam, the Lady Iseult!

TRISTAN, *in his sleep, loudly.*

Iseult!

ELAINE.

My lord is calling to you.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Not to me.
He is talking in his sleep.
(*Moving towards the bed.*) Was it to me,

Tristan, or the one woman in the world?
(*To* ELAINE.) I will watch beside him. Let me be
alone.

[ELAINE *goes out, and* ISEULT OF BRITTANY
*walks to and fro in agitation.*

Iseult is coming in the ship: he lives
Until the ship is here. She will come in
And take my husband, who was never hers,
Out of my arms. I have not stolen her name;
It is my own poor name. I have not stolen
Her love from this proud queen: it still is hers,
He is all hers, but he is also mine.
Why should she come, being so rich, to me
Who am so poor? Must beggars give back alms?
This man is mine, I hold him: better dead
And mine, than hers and living. What have I said?
It is this deadly woman whom I hate
That comes to bring him death. He shall not die.
Shall she suck out her poison in his wound?
She would not save him. Could I give him back
Into her hands if she would heal him? O
The bitterness of love, the hate of love,
So kind in the beginning and so sharp
A sickle when the seed has come to ear!
What am I but a woman, who loves only
The man whom she has held between her arms?
Shall I begin to hate him for her sake,
Because he loved no other than this fair,
This deadly royal woman of my name,
The other Iseult? Me he never loved.
Would that the sea drank her, and that her ship
Were gulped down living by a wide-mouthed wave!
She shall not take him from me while he lives.

TRISTAN, *in sleep.*

Iseult!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

He is calling on her in his sleep.

TRISTAN, *half awakening.*

Say nothing more. If I am sick to death,
There is one ending; but no tears, Iseult.
Open the window.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *going to the window and opening it.*

So?

TRISTAN.

Open it wide.
Do you not see a sail?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

There is no sail.
The wind is cold, and there is a grey rain.
Shall I not close the window?

TRISTAN, *rising in his bed.*

Listen! A cry.
It is the sea. Tell me, is it the sea?

There is another crying, but it is here,
Here in my wrists and forehead; but this voice
Is louder than the little voice of the blood.
Iseult, listen, and tell me if you hear.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

I hear the wind rushing and the waves beat.

TRISTAN.

Oh no, oh no,
It is the crying of an incurable wound,
It turns on a sick bed and cannot sleep,
It cries to me, and I am sick, I am sick.
[*He falls back on his bed.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *coming up to the bed.*

You must lie quieter than a sea-swallow
Upon a rocking wave. You know our birds
Find homes in the loud middle of the storm
When we are frightened. Cannot you, my lord,
Look for some peace and solace in this pain?

TRISTAN.

No, no, I can but cry as the sea cries.
I am as angry with my pain, as weak
And angry as the sea that hates the wind.
But you are gentle as a feathered thing
That the wind carries; and you do not fear the sea?
You do not fear me, Iseult?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

My dear lord,
There is some cruel stranger in your heart
I indeed fear; but you are always gentle,
And when you look at me and speak my name
You say my name as if indeed you loved me.

TRISTAN.

I made a song once, all men sing it now,
The song of Iseult, Tristan's life and death,
And women weep to hear it, and men too.
I made it with the sorrow of the world
And with the sorrow in the hearts of men.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Your eyes are full of tears to think of it.
Is it your pain? I would not, though the name
Be mine, that it should hurt you.

TRISTAN.

Love made the name.
It is a heart-shaped talisman and holds
The very heart of love. I say it over
Like something I remember in my sleep.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

I heard you say it in your sleep to-day.

TRISTAN.

Look, that was a white wing; it dipped in the wind:
A white bird: a good messenger. Look out,
Iseult, and tell me if you see a sail.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *going to the window.*

I see the grey sea and the grey sky. Nothing.

TRISTAN.

I am sick, Iseult; but if this ship would come,
It would bring life. He knows the medicine
That heals me even of death: he brings me life.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Has this physician from Salerno, then,
So infinite a skill?

TRISTAN.

Infinite skill!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Is he a man of books or does he find
Secret in herbs and healing in the earth?

TRISTAN.

All things are possible to love: he loves.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

He comes himself, if you but send for him?

TRISTAN.

I do not know if he will come himself;
But if he come, I know that I shall live.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Tristan, if I had skill to bring you life,
As I have will to do it and love too,
You should not need this coming; but alas,
I have but will and love and nothing else.
I cannot heal you; but if the Mother of God
Be yet in heaven the mother of us men,
You shall be healed.

TRISTAN.

Have you been praying, Iseult?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

I have not ceased to pray.

TRISTAN.

Shall God forgive?
I think that God did never yet forgive.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Lie quiet in your bed and do not think
About these things that we shall never know.
There have been prayers that saved from death.

TRISTAN.

Not so.
I shall lay by my glory with my soul,
And when my body, that feasted and lay warm,
Is sewn into a clout, then shall my hall
Be made with a spade, and my bower builded soon:
Worms shall come in to be my guests in the dark.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Why do you murmur over these old words
That the priests say in Latin?

TRISTAN.

There shall be,
In the grave, no forgetting.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

You shall live!

TRISTAN, *starting up.*

Why do you wake me? There is a sail?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

No sail!

TRISTAN, *wildly.*

Do you not see I am dying hour by hour,
And yet you will not come!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Hush, you speak wildly.

TRISTAN.

Iseult!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

See, I am here.

TRISTAN.

No, no, O God!
This agony that eats into my side,
This hurrying possessing of my blood,
This rat that gnaws me, this insatiable
And intimate infinity of pain
Will not delay: the ship, the ship delays!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Lie quietly, my lord; think not of this.

TRISTAN.

Is the sail black or white? If it be black,
It is a shroud the colour of my hope.
The sail is white, say that the sail is white!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

What should the sail betoken?

TRISTAN.

Why, my end.
It is the white wing of the bird in the sky
I saw out there, flying against the wind.
Why do you ask me what the white sail means?
If it be white —

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *eagerly.*

If it be white?

TRISTAN, *in a low voice, sinking back.*

I am saved.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *aside.*

If she is coming, it is the white sail;
But if she is not coming, the black sail.
(*To* TRISTAN.) What if it be the black sail?

TRISTAN, *faintly.*

The black sail,
I have forgotten what it means.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *moving towards the window.*

Now, now,
I am to do with this man what I will
For the first time. I hold him in both hands
Now. Am I still Iseult of the White Hands?
I have to give her signal to him, and for her
Tell him that she is coming. If she comes,
Who knows? It may be that the sail is black.
How can I see that sail and see it white?

TRISTAN, *feebly.*

There is no sail?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

There is no sail. The sea
Is empty, but the wind rises on it.

TRISTAN, *half unconscious.*

When we are dead —

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *running to the bedside.*

My lord!

TRISTAN.

No, they shall sing
No evil songs of us when we are dead;
They shall sing songs of us.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

O!

TRISTAN.

Happy lovers,
Because we drank one love out of one cup,
And death is not so sure.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

O! O!

TRISTAN.

Iseult,
(*Looking into vacancy.*) I have been faithful, Iseult.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *shrinking away.*

Now he sees
The other woman, and he cries to her.

TRISTAN.

Give me the cup.

[*She takes up the cup from beside his bed and pours wine into it.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Here, Tristan! Here is wine.
See, I will set my lips to it —

TRISTAN, *snatching it from her.*

No, no,
You must not drink it. What is in the cup?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Wine for your thirst, Tristan.

TRISTAN.

This is no wine.
You do not know what this is. Set it down.
[*She sets it down by the bedside.*
[*He again looks into vacancy.*
Have you forgotten, Iseult, and so soon?
It was not wine: I will not drink it twice,
I would not forget twice. Was it the cup
That put this faithful unforgetting fire
Into my marrow?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

No, it was the knife:
Do you not know? the knife of Meriadoc.

TRISTAN.

The blood of Morolt cries out of the knife,
Yet this is not his vengeance: it is hers.
It was for her he let her mother's poison
Into my side. You loved her, Meriadoc.
Have you loved better than I have? Iseult,

Where are you gone? You were here by my bed,
You would have healed me: someone thrust you back.
What are these white hands that I see, there, there,
Thrusting you back until you fade away?
I cannot see you any longer. Who
Is this pale woman with the angry eyes?
(*Looking at* ISEULT.) You are beautiful and yet I do not know you.

[ISEULT *covers her face with her hands.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

I am not angry, but you kill my heart.
Do you not know me, Tristan? Look at me.

TRISTAN.

I pray you, do not weep; but if you are
As pitiful as your weeping shows you, turn
And tell me if there is a sail upon the sea.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *going back to the window.*

Tristan, there is a sail!

TRISTAN.

O do not mock me.
Is there indeed a sail?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Yes, yes, a sail.
The ship is close under the castle walls.

It comes around the corner of the rocks.
It is close now, quite close.

TRISTAN, *starting up.*

Did I not know
That I had but to call and she would come?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

He calls to her: he sees her in the ship.

TRISTAN.

I have been lying in my grave, I think,
These years, and she is coming to waken me.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

These years, these years!

TRISTAN.

All will be well.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Already
He does not know me with his eyes: his eyes
See her already, he smiles to welcome her.
There is a great joy in his eyes: it kills
My heart. She shall not take him from my heart.

TRISTAN.

The sail! the sail! Look, look, can you not see
The colour of the sail?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

What shall I say?
Tears in my eyes blind me. I cannot see
What colour the sail is.

TRISTAN.

The sail is white!

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

The wind is tossing it, and the sea leaps
After the ship. She will be in the ship.
O wind and sea, why were you merciful?
She will be here. He sees her. What shall I say?
I will not be her messenger to him.

TRISTAN.

Look straight.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

I see, I see.

TRISTAN.

Is the sail white?

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *slowly turning her eyes on* TRISTAN.

The sail is black.

TRISTAN, *after a pause, slowly, in a faint voice, looking straight in front of him with ecstatic eyes.*

God bless you, Iseult; and good-night.
[*He falls back dead.*

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *rushing forward and leaning over him.*

Tristan,
It is a white sail. She is coming, Tristan.
Lift up your head, listen: Iseult is here!
[*She tries to raise his head.*
O — h! what have I done? No, no,
Wake, wake, Tristan, and let me die for you!
[*She flings herself on the bed, then rises and cries.*
Ygraine! Elaine! Imogen! He is dead.
[*The women rush in, followed by the* PHYSICIAN.
My lord is dead. I killed him, I myself.
Come closer. See, he is quite dead, quite dead.
You thought I loved him; but I killed him. Yet
I only spoke a word.
[*She bursts into hysterical weeping.*
[*Her women support her.*

YGRAINE.

Lead her away.
This sorrow is too heavy for her.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *to the* PHYSICIAN.

Sir,
You must awaken him: he is only sleeping.
You told me he would live till the ship came.
The ship is come. Why do you look at him
As if there were now nothing more to do?
Can you not make him lift one of these lids
That cover his eyes down from seeing her?
For he must see her. She is at the gate.
Wake him, wake him, and I will go away.

PHYSICIAN.

Madam, I cannot wake him.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

But I will.

[*She leans over the bed.*

Will you not waken, and look on me once,
Tristan, before she comes?

ELAINE.

Come, lady.

IMOGEN.

Come.
You will go wild with sorrow. Come with us.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY, *listens fearfully, hearing sounds without, then sits down by the bedside and takes hold of* TRISTAN'S *hand.*

Tristan, she is coming: do not let me go!

[*She stares fearfully at the door, which is thrown open, and* ISEULT OF IRELAND *appears on the threshold.*

[BRANGAENE *follows her.*

[*The women stand about the bed on which* TRISTAN'S *body lies, with heads bent and drooping hands.*

[ISEULT OF IRELAND *looks through them to the dead body.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *on the threshold, to* BRANGAENE.

Tristan is dead, and there is nothing left
In all the world. I have not come too late.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Too late, too late! I told him that the sail
Was black. I killed him. It was I who killed him.

ISEULT OF IRELAND.

Comfort yourself, Iseult of Brittany,
And hide your head and weep, if you will weep,
Because it had to be, and leave me here.
You have done nothing in this mighty death.

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

Where shall I go? for I have killed my lord.

[*She rises and with bowed head moves slowly away between her women, who lead her out of the door.*

ISEULT OF IRELAND, *going up to the bed.*

I kiss you for the last time on the mouth,
Tristan.

[*She bends over and kisses him, and then speaks over his body.*

He was the glory of the world;
All the world's dust, for Tristan can be dead.
This dust was once a fire and burned the stars:
Now what a little ashes holds the fire
That was blown out too early. There is nothing
Left in the world, and I am out of place.
Could you not wait for me until I came,
Tristan?

[*She lies down beside him and dies.*

BRANGAENE.

Mistress! my life! O she is dead. O lady,
Now you have your desire and are at rest.
(*To the* ATTENDANTS.) Come nearer, all of you, lay them royally
And side by side, body by body. Come.
Lift up her head, that his may not outtop
The fairest head in the world. You shall lie so.
Have you no rich cloths to lay over them?
Bring something to make up a royal bed.

[*The* ATTENDANTS *bring forward rich cloths and lay over them.*

[BRANGAENE *arranges them with care.*

[*An* ATTENDANT *rushes in.*

ATTENDANT.

The other ship is here. It is King Mark
With all his lords.

BRANGAENE.

He is not to come in
Until this work is over. Is all ready?

[*The door is flung open and* KING MARK *rushes in, followed by his* LORDS.

KING MARK.

Where is Iseult? Is Tristan here?

BRANGAENE, *going towards him and raising her hand to impose silence.*

No, King,
They are not here. Look where they were.

[*The* ATTENDANTS *draw aside, disclosing the two bodies.*

[KING MARK *comes forward.*

KING MARK.

Is death
Treacherous? Has he gone faster than I could?
Could I not come upon them in one bed
But death must find them first? I am too late.
There is no room for my revenge.

BRANGAENE, *coming forward.*

O King,
There is no room here for revenge. These two
Drank from one cup, not knowing, the long sorrow
Now ended in this death.

KING MARK.

The cup of love?

BRANGAENE.

It was the cup of love: the Queen of Ireland
Prepared a cup of love to bind your heart
To hers who now lies dead: she on the ship
Drank ignorantly with him who now lies dead
The cup of love you should have drunk with her.
There had been love between you; but these have loved
Not well or ill, but of necessity.

KING MARK.

Their love has wrought this evil of itself,
If it be evil to have died together.
Had I but known! Tristan, had I but known!
Had my son Tristan but had faith in me
And told me all the truth, then had I given
Iseult, whom I have loved, to be his wife.
But now has all this woe come to an end
In sorrow, and because we were all blind.
The woman whom I loved, and my one friend,
Lie here, and I am living still. So be it.
They shall be buried like a king and queen
Among the kings my fathers. Bear these two
Back to Tintagel. I will follow them.

THE END.

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